

Leading Factors for the Somalian Invasion of Ogaden: Foreign Intervention, and the Ethiopian Response (1977-1978)

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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to assess the historical out line on the Dynamics of Conflict and Intervention in North-East Africa: The Case Study on the Second Ethio- Somalian (Ogaden) War of 1977-1978. Hence, the Ogaden war, a brief but costly war fought between Ethiopia and Somalia that ended by the defeat of Somalia and her withdrawal in January, 1978 was seen differently by different sides. Opposing foreign intervention in civil wars has also been a central phenomenon of international politics. The war was aggravated by outsiders for many years and in 1970s, above all by the superpowers, namely, the USA and USSR, and also by their contingents. At the heart of the issues underlying the War in the Horn of Africa lie three legacies of the past: namely; European colonial rule; Somali irredentism; and superpowers intervention/ Afyare Abdi Elmi and Abdullahi Barise; 2006:45/. This conflict can be viewed as a meaningless tragedy for the people of the Horn of Africa in general and Somalia in particular. I argue that competition for resources and power, repression by the military regime and the colonial legacy are the background causes of the conflict. Politicized clan identity, the availability of weapons and the presence of a large number of unemployed youth have exacerbated the problem. With regard to the obstacles to peace, we contend that Ethiopia's hostile policy, the absence of major power interest, lack of resources and the warlords' lack of interest in peace are the major factors that continue to haunt the Somali peace process. Finally, the study propose ambitious peace-building mechanisms that attempt to address the key areas of security, political governance, economic development and justice in order to build a durable peace in Somalia.

Keywords: causes, conflicts, resistance, indoctrination, intervention, reconciliation

1. General Background

1.1 Geographical Setting

Somalia also called Somali Democratic Republic is located in East Africa, particularly in the Horn of Africa. It has the total area of 637,540 square kilometers from which 2,960 kilometers is the coastline. Topographically, it is flat plateau surface and predominated by plains; with principal exception of rugged east-west ranges in far north that include *Shimbir Berris*¹, the highest point at 2,407 meters in Somalia. ²

As location is concerned, Somalia faces the Arabian Peninsula to the north. A long the north east, it is bounded by the republic of Djibouti, while to the western and southern part is bounded by Ethiopia and Kenya respectively. The strategic location of the Horn of Africa and the surrounding areas namely the Red Sea East Africa and the Persian Gulf probably invited more than its fair share of interest and involvement by external powers. ³

For instance, the Horn of African has always been of strategic importance because of its geographical settings. It has most often than not, captured the attention of various states which started intervening in the politics of the region. It is

¹ *Shimbir Berris*, is the highest peak in Somalia Republic.

² Harold D. Nelson, "Somalia: A country study, Foreign Area studies" (The American university press, Washington DC, 1982), P.14.

³ Joseph K. Nkaisserry. "The Ogaden war: An analysis of Its Causes and Impact of Regional Peace on the Horn of Africa (Kenya, April, 1997),P.5.

this influence external to the Horn which has in part created a favorable condition for conflict to reign in the region. ⁴

There is no question as the artificial nature of the boundaries which cut across the same people and divided them. As illustration, let us look about the Somali people, who found themselves, divided in to British Somali land, Italian Somali land, French Somali land (Djibouti), British Kenya, and Ethiopia (Ogaden). Hence the boundaries in the Horn of Africa could be said to have been rather reflections of imperialist rivalries than a genuine pattern of population settlement a long geographical or ethnic lines. ⁵

1.2 Peopling of the Country

According to the 1975 population census the total population of Somalia was estimated as about 3.7 million. Its growth rate was 2.5 percent yields 4.3 million in 1981; pre dominantly rural-nomads and semi nomads make up about three-fifths of total; sedentary rural about one-fifth, urban (mainly in Mogadishu) about one-fifth. ⁶ However, based on July, 2003 estimation, the number of population reaches around 10,251,568.

In the case of the languages, Somali (script officially introduced in January 1973) spoken by all but very few in habitants. Several dialects; common Somali most wide spread; English and Italian languages used in some news papers; English in official documents intended for international use; Italian language was used in Somali national university. Besides, the Somali people used Arabic as the second officials language, but used chiefly in religions circles or contexts. ⁷

Ethnically, most nationals were ethnic Somalis; traditionally divided in to *Sammal* (Pastoral nomadic), which comprised about 75 percent, and Sab (sedentary or semi sedentary in south and between Juba and Shebelle rivers), consisted about 2 percent, and 5 percent was covered by other minority groups. ⁸ The Somalis are linguistically homogeneous ethnic group who have in habited large parts of the low land horn for several centuries. So far as is known, no identifiable Somali state ever existed in the past uniting the main Somali regions, and tribal divisions served to fragment the nomads in to rival confederacies. ⁹

As illustrated by Kinfe Abrham (2001; 349), the Ogaden part of Ethiopia is in habited by “ethnic Somalis” belonging to twelve clans among whom the Ogaden clan is numerically dominant. He also mentioned other important clans include the Isaa to the north of the Hararghe high lands, and *Isaaq* of who inhabit the *Haud* reserve, an area adjacent to northern Somalia. ¹⁰ The Somalis are largely pastoral nomads. The population of the Ogaden itself is about a million; the surrounding Oromo areas contain a much larger number of people. ¹¹

As the religion is concerned, Somalia officially has become Islamic state in which most nationals were Sunni Muslims. For instance, the dominant clan system that composed the central groups of Reewin, Hawiye, Darrod, and Issaq in Somalia traced their Arab descent exclusively from the Hashi mite family of the prophet Mohammed. ¹²

2. The Second Ethio- Somali (Ogaden) War of 1977-1978

2.1 Origins and Basic Causes for the War

As the major causes of the Ogaden war of 1977-1978 is concerned, many foreign and national historians have forwarded their own views about the source of friction in between Ethiopia and the government of Mogadishu over the Ethiopian Ogaden. In this context, many years before the actual revolution had started, the Somalis claimed a region called Ogaden after the tribe which lived there and included the three Ethiopian provinces of Bale, Hararghe, Sidamo and many other Oromo speaking territories¹³.

⁴ Alexander A. Vadala, “Major geopolitical explanations of conflict in the Horn of Africa,”(Ethiopia: Addis Ababa University Press, 2003), P. 627.

⁵ Vadala, P. 628

⁶ Central Statistics Agency. Population and census(Mogadishu, 1975).

⁷ Nelson, P.15.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Fred Hailiday, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1st ed.* (united Kingdom: Manchester. University press, 1981), P. 199.

¹⁰ Kinfe Abrham, *Ethiopia from Empire to Federation* (London/ Stockholm/ New York University Press, 2001), P. 349

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Mohammed H. Mukhtar, *Historical Dictionary of Somalia* (United States of America: the scare crow press (Oxford university press, 2003). P. 50

¹³ Halliday,P.199.

The Foreign historian, Fred Halliday indicated the two major aspects of the issues of the Somalis in Ethiopia as preconditions for the Ogaden war of 1977-1978. For instance, intra-Ethiopian aspect has been played a less significant issue, involving one of the numerically smaller nationalities who inhabit an area that is of secondary importance in which the region called 'Ogaden' may comprise up to a third of the geographical area of Ethiopia. The other aspect which Fred Halliday included is the international issue. This aspect is dealing about the role that the Ogaden Somalis played in the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia, and more generally in the international crisis that unfolded in the Horn in 1977-1978. ¹⁴

According to Fred Halliday, the dominant factor in the development of the Somali issue was neither local sentiment, nor, the disordered initiatives of the Provisional Military Administrative Council /PMAC/; but the policy of the government of Mogadishu, which decided in 1977 to take advantage of Ethiopian's instability and launch a military offensive to reclaim its 'lost lands' in Ogaden. This had been a claim of the Somali nationalist movement that arose in the 1940s in what were then the two colonies of British and Italian Somali land. ¹⁵

Beyond the ideological appeals of irredentism found in all aspects, Fred identified three particular factors behind the Somali claim to Ethiopian Ogaden. Accordingly, the first is the economic factor, in which Ogaden affords grazing during the six months of the rainy season and reports of oil deposits added a further attractions since 1960s serves a function within Somali society is the claim to Ogaden. The second factor as a whole, binding what is a highly fragmented collection by tribes together in the cause of fighting a common enemy. The third factor was existed from the tribes who claim to Ogaden in order to advance the interests of one of the four tribal confederacies inside Somalia, the *Darod*, to whom the Ogaden tribes belong. ¹⁶

Furthermore, as has been described by Br. General Joseph K. Nkaisserry, who was the leader of the Kenyan Army and the author of Strategy Research Project on the Ogaden are described that the cause for the Ogaden war of 1977-1978 was emanated when Somalia refused out of hand to acknowledge the validity of the 1954 Anglo-Ethiopian treaty recognizing Ethiopian's claim over the Ogaden in particular or the relevance of treaties defining the common border in between the two countries in general. ¹⁷

Joseph K.Nkaisserry (1997;13),has also added that underlying the territorial claim which was based on historical, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural continuity, was an extra ordinary phenomenon of Somali nationalism which incorporated all Somalis living in both Somalia and in the "lost territories". Besides, the shift of super power alliances, changes of political ideologies; Somali irredentism and the Ethiopian domestic instability were the major causes of the Ogaden wars of 1977-1978. ¹⁸

According to Kenneth G.Weiss, who was the author of the professional paper entitled the 'Soviet Involvement in the Ogaden war states that the basic cause for the outbreak of the Ogaden war was the primary thrust of the foreign policy of Somalia with the goal of uniting all Somalis under one national flag. Hence Somalia claims Ethiopia's Ogaden, Kenya's Northern Frontier District, and Djibouti as properly a part of Somalia. Here, he also added that the year 1977 seemed an ideal time to press Somali claims to the Ogaden as the Ethiopian revolution escalated to the centrifugal forces threatening the integrity of the empire. ¹⁹

David D. Laitin, has indicated that the cause for the second Ethio-Somali war of 1977-1978 was the interest of Somalia to exploit a periodic shift in the regional balance of power in their favor to occupy the Ogaden region, claimed to be the part of 'Greater Somalia'. Besides the afro-mentioned illustration, as him, the cause of the conflict was the desire of the Somali government of Said Barre aimed at incorporating the Somali-inhabited Ogaden region of Ethiopia in to a Greater Somalia. ²⁰

Adam Lockyer(2006;PP.3-4), was another author of the proceeding paper entitled 'Opposing Foreign Interventions Implication the course of Civil Wars: the Ethiopian-Ogaden civil war, 1976-1980;' presented at Australasian Political

¹⁴ Halliday, PP. 199-200.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Hailliday, PP. 201-202.

¹⁷ Nkaissery, P. 12

¹⁸ Nkaissery, P. 13.

¹⁹ Kenneth G. Weiss, "The soviet Involvement in the Ogaden war" Professional paper 269(institute of Naval studies: Virginia press, Feb. 1980), P.4.

²⁰ David D. Latin, *Somalia: Intervention in Internal Conflict* (Stanford university press, October 12, 2001)

Studies Association Conference in 2006²¹. As him, the basic cause for the Ogaden war of 1977-1978, was the partition of the Horn of Africa at the twilight of the colonial period that saw the establishment of new state borders that did not necessarily trace the boundaries of the Somali nation. In an outcome, Adam thought that the process throughout much of the post-colonial period, ethnic Somalia found themselves living with in a number of different states including Kenya, Djibuti and Ethiopia. Here, Ethiopia regained sovereignty over the Ogaden (the region that Somali nationalists refer to as “Western Somalia”) from the British in the autumn of 1948.²²

Another author who gave great illustration for the basic causes of the Ogaden war of 1977-1978 was Birouk Mesfin. He wrote a Thesis paper entitled “The Role of Military Power in Ethiopian’s National Security /1974-1991/” in June, 2002²³. As him, the most dangerous and explicitly military threat against Ethiopia was perceived to emanate from Somalia, the hostile intentions of which were expressed through official statements, diplomatic initiatives and support for the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF). For instance, these intentions were supported by a significant increase in military capabilities backed by the post 1963 Soviet military assistance which increased after 1974 and culminated in the 1977 Somali invasion²⁴.

In addition to this, the agenda was to be retrieved a long with the Northern District of Kenya and the French held Somali territory (the present day Djibouti). Therefore, the Five-Pointed Star in the national flag of Somalia attested the idea of the formation of a “Greater Somalia”, which served to “supersede the internal divisions between the formerly Italian and British parts” and as a unifying purpose for “the consolidation of the various family clans in to one Somali nation”.²⁵

As has been indicated by Fred Halliday, Berouk has also shared the common views concerning the basic causes of the Ogaden war in which Somalia wanted to control the Ogaden grazing lands, the oil and gas deposits reported to be in exploitable resources in the area, the Middle Courses of the Wabishebele and Ghenale rivers as well as to gain a more manageable shape, economic, making transportation and communication easier.²⁶

Mohamed Haji Mukhtar was also among the historians who described about the Ogaden war of 1977-1978. With in his book (Historical Dictionary of Somalia), Mohamed, indicated that the basic cause for the second Ethio-Somalian war was the ambition of the military regime of Somalia who promoted the idea of Pan-Somalism as a central ideological tent. Pan-Somali ideology could be said to have, destroyed the economy, as the bulk of the national budget went in to the national Army.²⁷

2.3 Courses of the War

As the course of the war second Ethio-Somalian War of 1977-1978 is concerned, many historians and scholars had forwarded their own views what they through to be the engagements of military powers in between the two contenders of the Horn of Africa. Many historians have indicated more or less the same ideas about the major wars conducted in between Ethiopia and the government of Mogadishu from 1977-1978²⁸.

Following the Somali invasion over Ogaden since July 13, 1977. Mengistu and his men were building a peoples Militia trained by North Korea and supplied by the Soviet Union, which the Dergue had made friendship from the outset of its rule. This is because Mengistu’s believe was that the USSR’s revolutionary history of national reconstruction was more in keeping with Ethiopia’s political goals than were the traditions of American capitalism and bourgeoisie liberalism.²⁹

Preliminarily, by 1975-1976, the government of Moscow was convinced that the Ethiopian revolution would lead to the establishment of an authentic Marxist-Leninist state, and it prepared to shift its interests from weak Somalia to Ethiopia, the leading state in the Horn of Africa. To the contrary, it continued to support Somalia with military ammunitions,

²¹ Adam Lockyer, ”Opposing Foreign Interventions in,-----“,2006),PP.3-4.

²² Adam Lockyer, “opposing Foreign Interventions Impact on the course of civil wars: The Ethiopian Ogaden civil war, 1976-1980”, (Sydeny: New castle university press, Sept. 25-27, 2006) PP. 3-4.

²³ Berouk Mesfin, “The role of military power in Ethiopian National Security, 1974-1991”. A Thesis submitted to the school of Graduated studies. (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University press, 2002). P. 122.

²⁴ Berouk Mesfin, “The role of military power in ----“,2002),P.122.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Mukhtar, P. 52.

²⁸ Ibid,P.52.

²⁹ Bahru Zewde, *Society ,State ,and History Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press,2008),P.255.

while at the same time promising Mengistu military supply on condition that he cut off the alliance with the government of United States. To bring this in to the reality, in April 1977, the government of Ethiopia closed down the American Military Mission and the *Kagnaw*³⁰ station base, an event followed in may 1977, by a secret agreement with Moscow to aid Ethiopian's military needs.³¹

Although the close intimacy between Somalia and Moscow has ended before the major war, Somalia had enough supplies to wage a six-month war and mustered 35,000 men and 15,000 Ogeden fighters in the western Somali Liberation Front /WSLF/ 250 tanks mostly fitted with 105 mm guns and 300 armed personnel carriers received from the Soviets in the form of military assistance³².

Harold G. Marcus has also added that president Siad Barre's government of Somalia had decided on war after having understood Ethiopia's weakness and disunity because of the war in Eritrea. Therefore, the few Ethiopian soldiers in scattered Ogaden garrisons could do little during may-June 1977 to defend the WSLF's attacks and were completely defeated by the Somali army, in the name of WSLF volunteers, who crossed the controversial frontier on 23 July, 1977³³.

By September 1977, the government of Mogadishu controlled 90 percent of Ogaden and had followed retreating Ethiopian forces by following their foot prints in to non-Somali inhabited regions of Bale, Hararghe and Sidamo. This Somali aggression irritated the Soviets, who from the outset had warned Siad Barre not to advance beyond Ogeden. Next to this, the government of Moscow consequently suspended all military supply to Somalia and began openly to deliver military weapons to Ethiopia and changed soviet military advisers from Somalia to Ethiopia.³⁴

According to an African Watch Report of 1991 on Evil days: 30 years of War and Famine in Ethiopia, Colonel Mengistu Hailemeriam called for "total people's war" against the "aggressors and secessionists" both Somalia and Eritrea respectively since August 1977. Here, his first target was the Somali invasion and the next target was the Eritrean fronts. Besides, six months later, the Ethiopian government was able to redeploy its forces from the Ogaden and continue to mobilize its still expanding army and air force, and counter-attack in Eritrea.³⁵

Based on the writings of Fred Halliday, both the USSR and Cuba tried to negotiate between Somalia and Ethiopia, and to disorder the Somali attack. But in June 1977, Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) guerrilla fighters began operating in Ogaden, and in July, the Somali regular army crossed the frontier. Furthermore, for several months it appeared that the Somalis had occupied the territories which they claimed and it was only in early 1978 that a joint Ethiopian and Cuban forces with substantial supplies of Soviet arms, counter-attacked and dislodged the Somali army across the borders.³⁶

Mengistu's state visit to Moscow, where he concluded with his new patron agreements for cooperation in the economic, cultural and military spheres, was coincided with a shift in international alignments in the region. Following this event, the U.S.S was being separated from Ethiopia and getting closer to the side Barre's government of Somalia. After having failed to patron the government to said Barre from his expansionist ambitions towards Ethiopia, the soviets found it far sighted to back the Ethiopian forces³⁷.

By the summer of 1977, Fidel Castro's rather excellent idea of a regional confederation had evaporated in to thin air under the heavy a full-scale war between Ethiopia and Somalia.³⁸

As has been illustrated by Bahru, the Somali forces made a quick advance in to the Ethiopian highlands, controlling strategic passes and major towns. However, the Somali attack was repulsed through a joint and impressive mass mobilization on the Ethiopian side with the raising of a militia force estimated to 300,000 strong men within a matter of

³⁰ *Kagnaw station base*, stands for Ethiopian army who deployed to Korea, in the form of Peace keeping force, in 1952.

³¹ Harold G. Marcus, *A history of Ethiopia* (Los Angeles: California university press, 1983), P. 196.

³² Marcus, P.196.

³³ Marcus, *Ibid*

³⁴ Marcus PP. 197-198.

³⁵ An African Watch Report, *Evil Days: 30 years of war and Famine in Ethiopia* a Davison of Human Rights Watch. (New York/London/ Los Angeles press, 1991), P. 113.

³⁶ Halliday, P. 202.

³⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁸ Bahru Zewde, *A history of modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* 2nd ed. (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa university press, 2002), P. 254.

months and the intervention of Soviet command officers, the Cuban and troops from Yemen.

As Somali irredentism was dealt a decisive blow, two more names were designed in Ethiopian battle folklore known as *Tataq*³⁹, the camp on the western outskirts of Addis Ababa where the military force was trained militarily, and the second battle folklore was known as *karamara*, the strategic pass in the Ogeden where one of the most decisive battles was fought.⁴⁰

The Somalian army advanced towards the Ethiopian Somali and then captured Ogaden in July 1977. This large scale Somalis conventional war was ended with the Ethiopian victory. As the result the Ethiopian army repelled the Somalian invasion in March 1978.⁴¹

The Ogaden war of 1977-1978 was typical of internal wars having directly or indirectly involved a range of regional and international actors; including the Soviet Union, the United States, Somalia, Cuba, South Yemen, Israel, East Germany, Ethiopia and North Korea. The external actors were involved on the warfare between the Ethiopian military Junta, normally referred to as the Dergue one on side and the main Ogaden Somali insurgent group, known as the Western Somali Liberation Front /WSLF/ on the other side.⁴²

Concerning the warfare in the Ogaden between Ethiopia and Somalia. Lockyer divided the war time period in to three major distinct phases known as: Medium intensity guerrilla warfare (1976-1977), Conventional warfare (1977-1978) and Low-intensity guerrilla warfare (1978-1980). Here, it is argued that each phase was to a large extent determined by the type and volume of support in which the Dergue and WSLF received from international sponsors⁴³. Based on these divisions, the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) mounted an insurgency against the Amhara dominated military junta also known as the Dergue from 1976 to 1980. However, after 1980, the WSLF operations fell in frequency, size and sophistication to a level that no longer made it a genuine threat to the survival of the territorial integrity of the Ethiopian state.⁴⁴

Elizabeth Schmidt, who is a professor of history at Loyola University in Mary Land had described about the course of the war having a common consensus with other writers of history. Accordingly, Moscow abandoned its alliance with Somalia's Socialist military regime for the more strategically located and politically promising Ethiopia beginning from in early 1977. Following this Washington simultaneously served its military ties to Ethiopia. This is because of Mengistu's ideological aspiration to divert his policy and friendship towards the Soviet Union.⁴⁵

As illustration, Elizabeth forwarded that, following Somalis invasion of neighboring Ethiopia since July, 1977 in an attempt to conquer the Ogaden territory, which was inhabited primarily by ethnic Somalis, the Soviet Union responded with an outpouring of military support for the government of Ethiopia which was involved in the cruelest suppression of its own population. As the part of the cold war, the Carter administration in the United States engaged in much internal debate before declining to aid the war efforts of the equally abusive Somali regime although Washington provided significant military and economic support to Somalia after its 1978 withdrawal from the Ogaden.⁴⁶

According to the emphasis given by Taylor and Francis, Somalia's abortive invasion of the Ogaden from 1977-1978 had in fact triggered a major shift in alliances in the Horn, paving the way for a reincorporation of Somalia, along with Sudan and Kenya in to the "Regional Security Framework" being established by the Western powers in cooperation with conservative Arab countries.⁴⁷

Moscow's involvement in the Somali-Ethiopian conflict in 1977 and 1978 ended in the most impressive exercise of

³⁹ *Tataq*, stands for Ethiopia's battle field folklore

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kinfe Abraham, *Ethiopia from Empire to Federation* (London/ Stockholm/ New York University press, 2001), P. 349.

⁴² Lockyer, , P. 1.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Lockyer, PP. 2-3.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Schmidt, "H. Diplo Roundtable Review on the Etio-Somalian war"(Mary Land: Kent University Press, 2013), P. 2 URL:<http://www.h.net.org-diplo/roundtables>

⁴⁶ Ibid .

⁴⁷ Taylor and Francis, "Foreign powers and Militarism in the Horn of Africa": *part I. Review of African political Economy, No. 30. conflict in the Horn of Africa* (Sept. 1984), P. 8.

URL:<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4005683>

Soviet politico-military diplomacy. For instance, by 1976, a year before the beginning of the actual war, the increasingly pro-Soviet, anti imperialist stance of the Dergue combined with its repressive policies and large arms requirements to fight the Eritrean secessionist movements made it difficult for the government of U.S.A to justify its support of Ethiopia.⁴⁸

The Soviets apparently did not anticipate the Somali offensive. The Ethiopians later claimed that the Soviets had assured them that they would prevent the Somalis from attacking by using force. These assurances led the Ethiopians in April 1977 to move artillery and an armored battalion from Gode, a strategically located town near the Somali border with the only good air base in the Ogaden to fight rightists along north western Ethiopia⁴⁹.

In addition to this, Kenneth also explained that once the Somalis did invade Ethiopia, Moscow played for time to negotiate Siad Barre to withdraw from the Ogaden. Here, Havana's published account of Cuban participation in the Ogaden war gave the date of the Somali invasion as July 13, 1977, yet the Ethiopians did not publically denounce the attack until July 24, 1977. This suggests that the Ethiopians delayed these steps in difference to Soviet promises to persuade the Somalis to withdraw.⁵⁰

After they failed to re council the differences between Somalia and Ethiopia, the soviets intervened on a large scale I the horn to ensure as favorable outcome as possible to their objectives in the region.⁵¹ The government of Somalia tasked its primary intelligence agency, known as the National Security Service, to gather information of all kinds with special focus on Ethiopia's political stability, the location and terrain of conceivable operations, the dispositions and movements of the Ethiopian troops as well as their condition of preparedness. On July 13, 1977, the Siad Barre government of Somalia waged war against Ethiopia by using *Hargeisa*, the operational command and logistics center because of its geographic proximity to the northern and strategic part of the Ogaden. There were two main lines of Somali advance in eastern Ethiopia, and a third attack in to Bale and Sidamo came through Dolo. Whereas the main attack by mechanized and tank units was advanced through Gode and up to the total length of the Ogaden to Jijiga with a second attack along the rain way line towards Dire Dawa.⁵²

In August 1977, the Somali forces suffered two setbacks when they tried to capture Dire Dawa, which was Ethiopia's third largest city, an important rail, industrial and commercial center and the site of a strategic forward air base, and Jijiga, which was the eastern most Ethiopian strong hold, a tank and radar base⁵³.

The Somali troop's finest success of the war under Brigadier General Mohamed Nur Galal came in September 1977 when they captured Jijiga in their second attempt. For their victory, the Somalian army used the Soviet style tactics known as Massive artillery bombardment, followed by huge infantry and mechanized assaults, three tank battalions over whelmed the defending Ethiopian troops.⁵⁴

In October 1977, the Somali forces successfully violated the strategic *Marda*⁵⁵ also known as *Karamara pass*, which was the gate way to the rugged and dry Amhar mountains running from east to west and formed the strongest defensive barrier to the flat Ogaden plain, and thus forcing the Ethiopian troops to fall back on Dire Dawa and Harar, which was the Ogaden area's Ethiopian military command center. By the end of October, the Somali forces were essentially stalemated at various points along the road to Harar.⁵⁶

Besides, the Ethiopian counter-offensive consisted of largely slow advances along the entire front, employing artillery barrages and massed columns of armor carefully engineered tactic-full lthio-Cuban forces crossed the Amhar mountains by passing Somali troops fort in around the Marda/Karamara pass/. Because of the surprise attack on the Somali forces, Ethiopia recaptured Jijiga on March 5, 1978 after two days of fierce fighting "in which four Somali brigades were cut to pieces and 3,000 troops were killed". Following the fall of Jijiga, the Ethiopian forces swept through the Ogaden desert to recover the major towns. Then the Ethiopian army was assured when "on March 9, 1978 the government of Somalia

⁴⁸ Weiss, P. 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Weiss, P. 8.

⁵¹ Weiss, P. 26.

⁵² Berouk, PP 122-125.

⁵³ Informants: Ayalew Mekonnen, Admass Seyoum; Berouk,, pp.126-127.

⁵⁴ Berouk, PP. 126-127.

⁵⁵ *Marda /Karamara* –was a battle field where huge number of soldiers were fought during the major war.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

announced that its troops had been re called from the occupied territory of Ethiopia. ⁵⁷

At that time, the Somalis had expected about the Soviet and Cuban led Ethiopian forces to spear head their attack through the strategic Karamara mountains range. To the contrary, the Russian planners and advisors organized a Massive Air lift, of troops and an armored unit to positions behind the Somali forces. The Cubans on the other hand played the crucial role of encircling the mountains and attacking the Somali positions from the north and north east. Concurrently, heavy Soviet artillery pounded the Somali held positions at Karamara and thousands of Ethiopian militia was sent in successive waves to draw fire to exhaust Somali ammunition supplies. ⁵⁸

3. International Links

After the 1977-1978 Ogaden war, Ethiopia received military assistance from the countries of socialist line, including the Soviet Union Cuba, East Germany, South Yemen, North Korea (by the late 1980s), Israel, Bulgaria, and Libya and, Somalia also received its assistance from WSLF, China, and USA, United Kingdom, Italy, Djibuti, Egypt, Rumania, Iran and etc⁵⁹.

Based on the illustration of Berouk, the afro-mentioned Socialist States has been discussed separately in the following way:

3.1 The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union initiated a huge military assistance to Ethiopia after the 1977 Somali invasion of Ogaden. The Soviet assistance covered the supply of about, a billion dollars worth of weapons, including hundreds of tanks, armored vehicles, combat aircraft, helicopters, surface to air missiles, diverse artillery items as well as light weapons. It also involved the launching of a control satellite, and the strengthening of the Ethiopian forces by as far as 1,500 Soviet advisors and thousands of Cuban military personnel. In 1978, Ethiopia concluded a twenty-year treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. ⁶⁰

3.2 Cuba

From 1977 to 1978, out of a genuine streak of “proletarian internationalism,” Cuba deployed 17,000 troops in Ethiopia many, of whom were brought in from Angola. These troops went far beyond their training and advisory missions, and actually participated directly in fight against Somali forces hastening the Ethiopian victory. Cuban troops were never involved against the Eritrean operations, but their continued presence in Eastern Ethiopia enabled the Ethiopian command to redeploy many of its troops to the northern part of the country. Ethiopian military personnel were also sent to Cuba for training in political indoctrination, intelligence as well as training management and logistics. ⁶¹

3.3 East Germany and North Korea

East Germany’s military assistance to Ethiopia started in 1977 (immediately after the outbreak of the Ogaden war), initiated at the Urge of the Soviet Union, the champion of communism with in world politics at the time. Both East Germany (GermanDemocraticRepublic) and North Korea provided logistical and command advice, and gave ideological training for hundreds of Ethiopian officers⁶².

During the 1978 Ethiopian offensive against the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), East German engineers reportedly built roads, which enabled Ethiopian tanks to attack behind EPLF lines. However, Ethiopia sought the military assistance from North Korea after the declining of Soviet Military support to Ethiopia since the late 1980s.⁶³ The emphasis of Berouk has mainly focused on the victor of the war (Ethiopia) then the victim (Somalia)⁶⁴.

4. Final Effects of the War

As the final effects of the Ogaden war of 1977-1978 in concerned, many foreign and local writers tried to explain in the following way: Berouk in his Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies described that the principal factors

⁵⁷ Berouk, P.128.

⁵⁸ Nkaisserry, P. 19.

⁵⁹ Berouk, P.106. Informants: Admass Seyoum, Ayalew Mekonnen.

⁶⁰ Berouk, *Ibid*.

⁶¹ Berouk, P. 108.

⁶² Informants: Ayalew Mekonnen, Admass Semegn.

⁶³ Berouk, P. 109.

⁶⁴ Berouk, *Ibid*.

which accounted for the Ethiopian victory over the Somalis were Ethiopia's decisive air superiority, sentiments of nationalism/ which ran deep in the Ethiopian national character/, Massive Soviet weapon transfer, better strategic command, increased Ethiopian moral, improvement in the field of command, the contribution of Cuban forces and supply problems on the side of Somalis.⁶⁵

Brigadier Joseph K. Nkaisserry, the leader of Kenyan army and the author of the Ogaden war with in his strategy research project illustrated that the defeat of the Somali army in the Ogaden seemed to hold new possibilities for both sides. For instance, for the Ethiopians, the fruits of victory were not as sweet as they may have seemed in the days after the battle of Jijiga⁶⁶.

However, the WSLF /Western Somali Liberation Front/, continued its war of liberation without discouraging the defeat of the Somali army. Overtime, it pressurized serious damage that drastically lowered the moral of the Ethiopian army in the Ogaden. On the other hand and as the result of their defeat, the Somalis realized that their irredentism had created more enemies than friends. Consequently, the Somalis developed a more active strategy of a abandoning the claims over the Ogaden, but retaining the right to assist the fight by Ogaden Somalis for "self-determination"⁶⁷. According to the author, the two most important lessons learnt from the Ogaden war of 1977-78 were grouped as political and military lessons⁶⁸.

Politically; the Somalis miscalculated the Soviet's over all interests in the Horn, failed to see the consequences of playing a double game with the super powers, failed to realize that, Ethiopia was strategically more valuable to the super powers than Somalia and the Somalis counted for moral and material support from the Arab League that did not arrive earlier, Somalia was also viewed by the world community as aggressor. Whereas militarily, the need for quick success and short war was essential to Somalia in order to achieve decisive results. However, Somalia did not have the capacity to sustain a long war due to lack of both material and human resources.⁶⁹

Once the Ogaden had been cleared of Somali forces with Russian and Cuban help, the Provisional Military Administrative Council /PMAC/ turned its attention towards Eritrea.⁷⁰ Following the victory of a combined Ethio-Cuban forces over Somalis at the town of Jijiga (March, 1978, Siad Barre broad cast the withdrawal of all Somali forces from Ogaden. Then on 23 March 1978, Radio Addis Ababa announced that the government had regained over all Ogaden military posts and administrative centers.⁷¹

The Ogaden war and its after math partly explains the rise of nationalist and secessionist movements in what is today Isaaq dominated, Somali land, first among which was the Somali National Movement (SNM), which was founded in 1981 and supported by Ethiopia.⁷² Although the Somalian army was advanced towards the Ethiopian Somali and captured Ogaden in July, 1977, this large scale Somali's conventional war was ended when the Ethiopian army repelled the invasion in March 1978.⁷³

Mohammed Siad Barre fell from power in 1991. His position had been fundamentally weakened by his failed attempt to recapture the Ogaden from Ethiopia in 1978. Somalia's defeat was a considerable humiliation by that undermined Barre's political position.⁷⁴

5. Methodology

This research was conducted based on the qualitative approach where both primary and secondary sources of data are significantly used. To mention some of them; key informants, focus group discussions, archival materials and analyzing both oral and written sources. The written primary and secondary documents are all well discussed depending on their

⁶⁵ Berouk, PP. 129-130.

⁶⁶ Nkaisserry, PP. 20-22.

⁶⁷ Nkaisserry, PP. 20-22.

⁶⁸ Nkaisserry, *ibid*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*.

⁷⁰ Halliday, P. 173. Informants: Ayalew Mekonnen, Alganeh Ereta.

⁷¹ Marcus, P. 199.

⁷² Bjorn Moller, "The Somali conflict and the Role of External Actors", *Danish Institute for International Studies Report* (Denmark: Copenhagen press, 2009), P. 10.

⁷³ Kinfe, P. 349

⁷⁴ <http://www.foxit software.com> for evaluation only, P. 245

preparation and in formations attached within it. The oral sources were collected from the key social groups/nomadic people/ who are earning their day to day livelihood through herding and seasonal farming through irrigation and rainfall. These nomadic pastoralists, who evicted from their homes because of the entire advance of the Somali army deep in to their villages and the former ex-soldiers who fought against the Somalian expansionists were selectively discussed and become the focus group as an event is concerned. Furthermore, written materials were also tapped in an effort to fill historical gaps.

The researcher has also exerted great effort and succeeded in assessing vital archival sources from the study area. This case study has developed based on books, thesis dissertations, document analysis, Key Informants, internet sources and other reports.

In order to make the Study well done, complete and comprehensive, the researcher lacked well updated and validated documents that can give clear cut image of information about the second Ethio-Somalian /Ogaden/ war of 1977-78. However, in order to carry out this paper, the researcher has made maximum efforts to gather the evidence from Bahir Dar University Library, from ex-soldiers through direct intervention and from internet sources.

6. Results and Discussions

6.1 Strategies for Comprehensive Peace-Building

As has been explained by Afyare Abdi Elmi (2006:45), Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the former Secretary-General of UN during the major war, defined peace-building as the “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse in to conflict”⁷⁵. He argues that processes of building peace require addressing the root causes of conflict and the peace-building strategy must include security, political arrangement, economic development and justice components⁷⁶.

Peace processes that produce transitional governments and the appropriateness of the endorsed governance models for the Somali context have to be revisited. For a peace process to produce a legitimate and broad-based government, the Somali people must own the process. Somalia’s hostile neighbors manipulated the Mpegati Conference to the extent that they marginalized the Somali people completely⁷⁷.

The task for the superpowers, therefore, is to make it impossible for either of Ethiopia or Somalia to upset the present equilibrium either by over arming itself or by being seriously weakened by internal and external threats⁷⁸. This short-term solution is balance-of-power theory’s contribution to the search for long lasting peace in the area. A more permanent solution is for the two countries to peacefully resolve the fundamental issue of their conflict, that is, their territorial dispute; otherwise, the Ogaden campaign of 1977 to 1978 may turn out to be another in a series of battles in a long, drawn-out war⁷⁹.

As has been described by Elizabeth Chebet Kigen (2002; pp.89-90), the re-conciliation between Ethiopia and Somalia came in to reality towards the end of the cold war in 1988, when the superpowers did not need these countries anymore for their military and ideological competition as they were signing treaties that led to the end of the cold war⁸⁰. Since then, Ethiopia and Somalia signed a Peace Treaty to end their hostility. The Accord also recognized Ethiopia’s control over Haud and the contested grazing lands in the Ogaden that the British restored to Ethiopia since 1954 although Somalia seemed to have partial commitment to peace and thus hostilities between these countries remain to date⁸¹.

For the time being, the super powers have undermined security, peaceful co-existence of the people and the smooth movement of people and property in both Ethiopia and Somalia. However, it is very unsafe to walk freely in some parts of Somalia today. The arms have also worsened the current conflicts in Somalia and have contributed to the destruction

⁷⁵ Afyare Abdi Elmi and Abdullahi Barise, “The Somali Conflict: Root causes, obstacles, and peace-building strategies”, *African Security Review* 15.1 *Institute for Security Studies* (2006), P.45.

⁷⁶ Afyare Abdi Elmi and Abdullahi Barise, “The Somali Conflict”, (2006), P.45.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ayodeji.O. Ogundele,B,A, “Balance-Of-Power Theory And The Ethiopian-Somali Conflict Of 1977-1978”,(Thesis Presented to the Graduate Council of the North North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1987),P.103.

⁷⁹ Ayodeji.O.Ogundele,B.A, Balance of---,1987),P.103. Informants: Ayalew Mekonnen, Admass Seyoum,Assefa Abajehu.

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Chebet Kigen. “The Impact Of The Cold War On The Ethiopia-Somalia Relations, 1960-1990”(The *Institute Of Diplomacy And International Studies, Reg. No.: R/50/7000*(University Of Nairobi 2002),.Pp.89-90.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Chebet Kigen.”The Impact of---, 2002),PP.89-90.

of national assets and resources. They have contributed to the displacement of many citizens and have legalized the killings, banditry and other illicit inhuman activities⁸².

The arms have drastically undermined the realization of peace accords that Ethiopia and Somalia have bilaterally and multilaterally signed. They have also brought individuals to perpetual fear and terror that bred mental instability and other psychological problems⁸³.

Although the War ended since 1978, the relations between Ethiopia and Somalia Republic are not good yet. Probably, Ethiopia and Somalia would have had good relations if the cold war did not exist. This study also showed that the cold war hindered successful pursuit of common objectives in Ethiopia and Somalia, as they could not make objective decisions⁸⁴. They could not reach Consensus on issues that were of vital interests, since they viewed everything through the lens of cold war' rivalry and ideological differences⁸⁵.

Finally, due to the negative impact of the cold war on the Ethiopia- Somalia interstate relations, it may take a very long time to establish good relations between these states. Even if Somalia attains peace and unites, Ethiopia fears that a united Somalia may re-consider the expansionist policy. Alternatively, even if Somalia relinquishes its expansionist policy and vise a vise⁸⁶,

7. Conclusion

At the heart of its issues concerning the Horn of Africa, there were the three legacies that under lie the Ogaden war of 1977-1978, namely, European colonial rule, Somalia's irredentist claims and the involvement of super powers and intervention in the Horn. However, the war also was due to its serious errors engaged by Somali leaders. As an aggressor, Somalia's perceptions were accurate only with respect to the existence of a local power imbalance.

Regarding the prospects of external support for its irredentist claims, Somalia over estimated the degree of potential western support and under estimated the potential intensity of Soviet and Cuban support for Ethiopia. There are other regional, local and international factors that contributed to the outbreak of the conflict, notably among these were the domestic instability of Ethiopia, the rise of Somali power and the ambiguous signals by western countries concerning political support for Somalia. Although concerted efforts from the Soviets, the government of US, OAU and the UN to restrain them, the Somali's would not accept a peaceful settlement of the dispute. This costly war did not achieve any tangible possible results as far as the Horn of Africa is concerned. Indeed, in the long run it contributed to the collapse of Somalia as a state in 1990. Fundamentally, Ogaden and other border issues between Ethiopian, and Somalia and other regional neighbors remain unresolved. The war can be viewed as a meaningless tragedy for the people of the Horn of Africa.

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⁸² Elizabeth ,P.90.

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Elizabeth,2002,P.94.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

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